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NARRATIVE HISTORY

OF

"G" and 7th

TANK BATTALION

1919

Xtra card Mr Dornbusch

1. European war, 1914-1918 — Regt. hist. —
Gt. Br. — Tank Batt., 7th.

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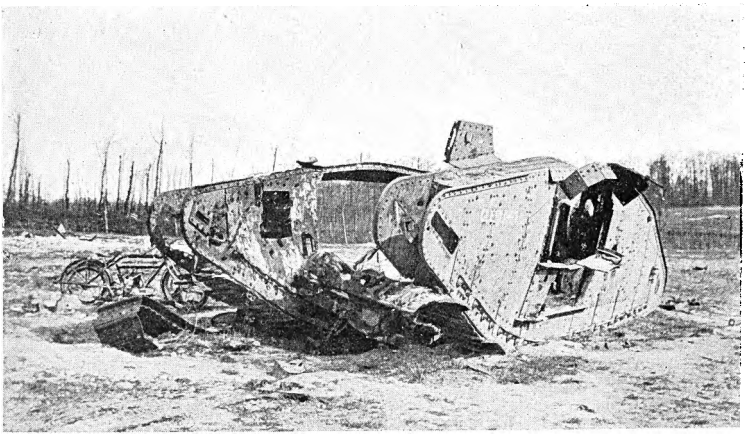

"GLENLIVET II," BOURLON WOOD, NOVEMBER 1917.

"GRASSHOPPER" AT THE SHOOTING BOX, BOURLON WOOD, NOVEMBER, 1917.

Frontispiece

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Great Britain. Army. 74th tank battalion.

NARRATIVE HISTORY

OF

"G" AND 7TH

TANK BATTALION

1919

ALDERSHOT
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WELLINGTON WORKS
1919

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PREFACE

1. THIS narrative history of "G" and 7th Tank Battalion has been compiled by a Committee of Officers who had access to all available records and collaborated with many old officers and men of the Battalion. The Battalion owes to Captain G. S. Ritchie and Captain B. S. Beale and all others who assisted, their very best thanks. It is much regretted that this history has not been published earlier :—

> "Many delays, much grousing ;
> All that energy and language can do has been done."
> *Old Story.*

> "Our God and soldier we alike adore
> When at the brink of ruin, not before
> After deliverance, both alike requited :
> Our God forgotten and our soldiers slighted."
> 1592—1644. FRANCIS QUARLES.

2. Most of the Battalion became demobilized about the end of January ; and then small numbers, till, on March 21st, 1919, ten Mark V tanks, four Officers, and 101 other ranks were transferred to the 12th Tank Battalion. Their Headquarters and colours (red and mauve) being those in the 1st Tank Brigade selected for the formation of a battalion for the Army of the Rhine.

Brigadier-General E. B. Hankey, D.S.O., with the Headquarters of the 3rd Tank Group—one of the three groups which had come into existence about the time of the Armistice, was given the command of the Army of the Rhine Tank Group. This consisted of two Tank Brigades—the Headquarters of the 2nd Tank Brigade, under Brigadier-General H. K. Woods, D.S.O., with the 4th and 9th Battalions ; the Headquarters of the 5th Tank Brigade, under Brigadier-General A. Courage, D.S.O., M.C., with the 12th, 13th, and 16th Battalions, being built upon.

3. The 7th Tank Battalion cadre of four officers (Lieutenant-Colonel H. O. C. Thorp, Captain E. S.

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Abbott, Lieutenant L. G. Collins, Lieutenant C. R. Godwin) and twenty-six other ranks crossed from France via Boulogne and Dover to Wareham, Dorset, on Saturday, May 10th, which they reached about 9.30 p.m. Here they were met by Brigadier-General E. B. Mathew-Lannowe, C.M.G., commanding the Tank Training Centre, Wool. The cadre then marched to Worgret Camp, Wareham, being attached to the Tank Depot. Here for a week—it seemed more—they were quartered in lines opposite the 19th Tank Battalion, the "G2," or younger sister Battalion. This was one of the six Battalions raised in September, 1918, from a nucleus of the old Battalions.

4. The old Battalion being wanted no longer, the cadre was disbanded, with the cadres of the old Battalions from France, on Empire Day, Saturday, May 24th, 1919.

5. I hope the old members, most of whom now belong to the Tank Association, and whose address is known to the General Secretary, Tank Association Hut, Horse Guards Parade, Whitehall, London, S.W. 1, may meet for many a cheery evening either in London or at the branches in Glasgow, Liverpool, and Birmingham.

6. I suggest to the officers that Saturday, November 8th, 1919, just short of the anniversary of the Armistice, the announcement of which pleased us all so much, seems a suitable date and season for a Reunion Dinner. Major Lawrence B. P. Merrian, M.C. (The Bath Club, 34, Dover Street, W. 1), has kindly consented to act as Honorary Secretary. Nearer the date the Objective, Zero day, and hour (winter time) will be communicated through the Press to all concerned. Doubtless this will become an annual fixture hereafter.

(Sd.) H. O. C. THORP, Lieut.-Col.,
7th Tank Battalion Cadre.

JUNIOR UNITED SERVICE CLUB,
CHARLES STREET, S.W.1.
Empire Day,
Saturday, May 24th, 1919.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

NEED OF A NEW WEAPON.

THE stalemate of mutual impregnability, brought about on the Western Front by the elaborate developments in the science and practice of trench warfare which followed the first Battle of the Marne, demanded the intervention on one side or the other of some entirely novel method or weapon of offence which should break the spell of tactical stagnation, and restore the possibility of movement.

A GERMAN INNOVATION.

The enemy's resort to the use of poison gases, designed to demoralize his adversary and reduce his troops to virtual impotence, met with some initial success, but even in its first surprise employment this new device did not materially affect the situation, and the prompt measures taken by the Allies to defeat it brought it in no long time to the level of the commonplace.

THE TANK.

The conception of mobile forts, so constructed as to be able to cross ground broken by trenches and shell fire, to surmount natural and artificial obstacles, and to advance against the highly organized defensive fire of rifles and machine guns, fell to the part of Great Britain, but in the secrecy that enshrouded the early

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design and construction of the tank, the credit of its first invention remains still concealed.

> What immortal hand or eye
> Framed thy fearful symmetry ?—

(not to speak it profanely) is a question yet unanswered in respect of Tanks as well as tigers.

The new engine of war—the old tail-wheeled tank—was first employed in the Somme Battles of September, 1916, by the Heavy Branch of the Machine Gun Corps, and, though meeting in these early days with but indifferent success, it was recognized by the Allied military authorities as a weapon capable of development and of far-reaching possibilities in co-operation with other arms.

FORMATION AND TRAINING OF "G" BATTALION.

Two months after the time when tanks made their first appearance in the theatre of war "E" and "F" Companies of the Heavy Branch—which had been recruited chiefly from the Motor Machine Gun formations—were moved from Elveden, in Norfolk, to Bovington Camp, near Wareham, and these Companies constituted the nucleus of "G" Battalion, which was formed as a Tank Service unit at Bovington under Lieutenant-Colonel E. B. Hankey, of the 2nd Worcestershire Regiment, on November 25th, 1916.

The Battalion comprised three Companies, which, following a consecutive numbering throughout the Heavy Branch, became known as the 19th, 20th, and 21st, and the first Company Commanders were Majors F. H. Fernie, A. Holford Walker, M.C., and H. L. Birkin. Each Company Commander was assisted by a Captain as Second-in-Command, and each Company was organized in five sections, four of them fighting sections, and the fifth a "workshops" section. Each

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section was commanded by a Captain or subaltern, and each fighting section consisted of four tank crews. The crew comprised seven men (three drivers and four gunners, one or other of them being a non-commissioned officer), and was commanded by a subaltern. This company organization was maintained throughout the course of the war, except that subalterns in command of sections were given the acting rank of Captain, and that the workshops sections were, as the general personnel became proficient in the technical maintenance of the tanks, withdrawn and centralized.

At Bovington "G" Battalion was brigaded along with "E" and "F" Battalions, and entered upon a strenuous programme of training under Brigade arrangements. Courses of instruction were instituted in the mechanism, driving, and maintenance of the improved tailless tank; in the Hotchkiss 6-pounder gun, the Lewis machine gun, the revolver, and the magnetic compass; in bombing, signalling, and the care and employment of carrier pigeons. While not engaged on courses, officers and men carried out infantry training, Lewis gun instruction and drill, tank drill, and tactical exercises, and all officers were incessantly practised in map-reading and reconnaissance, and the selection and following of tank routes.

Major Birkin left the Battalion at the end of January, 1917, and was succeeded in the command of the 21st Company by Major F. H. E. Torbett.

THE BATTALION GOES TO FRANCE.

After a long winter, severe in respect both of weather and training, the Battalion was pronounced ready for service overseas. The first four Tank Companies went to France in August, 1916, and later formed the nuclei for "A," "B," "C," and "D" Battalions, which were organized as Battalions in France in November, 1916.

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On May 24th, 1917, " G " Battalion was entrained at Wool Station for Southampton. Embarkation took place the same day, and on the following day the Battalion landed at Le Havre, whence, after a three days' rest, it moved by rail to Wavrans, near St. Pol. Detraining at Wavrans, the Battalion established its Headquarters at St. Martin l'Eglise, and the three Companies were separately billeted in St. Martin and the neighbouring villages of Sautrecourt and Pierremont. Further training here and courses of mechanical instruction at Erin, in driving over battle-broken ground at Wailly, and in gunnery at Merlimont, afforded opportunities for the recapitulation and supplementing of the lessons of Bovington.

In France " G " Battalion was brigaded with " D " and " E," the three Battalions constituting the 1st Tank Brigade. Shortly after its arrival at Wavrans the Battalion was inspected by Colonel Baker-Carr, the Brigadier.

On July 11th thirty-six Mark IV tanks were issued to the Battalion from the central workshops at Erin and allotted equally to the Companies, each section receiving one " male " tank carrying two 6-pounders and four Lewis guns; and two " female " tanks, each armed with six Lewis guns. With these tanks the Battalion entrained at Erin, and on the 14th reached the railhead in Oosthoek Wood, some four miles west of the ruins of Ypres. Detrainment was effected at the expense of some slight casualties under shell-fire. The tanks were parked in the wood on both sides of the Chemin Militaire, and the Battalion was quartered under canvas in La Lovie Wood, two miles to the north-west of Poperinghe.

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CHAPTER II

THE SALIENT

PREPARATIONS FOR ATTACK.

DURING the fortnight that followed the Battalion's arrival in the salient, all officers were busy with the reconnaissance of the ground to the east of the Yser Canal, and all crews with the preparation of the tanks for an attack on the enemy's positions along the Steenbeek Line. Sections marched daily to the woods at Oosthoek, which were shelled periodically and bombed every night from the air; and officers went nightly in pairs to study, in the gas-poisoned precincts of the canal, the enemy's artillery treatment of the available crossings.

Major Holford Walker and Major Torbett went back to England on account of sickness, and on August 6th were succeeded in their commands of the 20th and 21st Companies by Major A. G. Kenchington, M.C., and Major R. H. Broome, M.C.

THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES.

For the purposes of the attack "G" Battalion was attached to the 18th Corps. During the nights of July 27th, 28th, and 29th, the 19th and 21st Companies moved their twenty-four tanks from Oosthoek to a position of deployment at Frascati Farm, about 2,000 yards behind the front line. All the tanks reached this position before daylight on the 30th—some of them before daylight on the 29th—and there they lay camouflaged until the night of the 30th, when all but one of them (which failed to get started) moved forward to starting points some 500 yards behind the front line.

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JULY 31ST, 1917.

The attack of the 18th Corps was launched on a two-divisional front of 2,400 yards at 3.50 a.m. on the morning of the 31st, eight tanks operating with the 51st Division, and fifteen with the 39th.

The enemy's line was strongly held, bristling with machine guns mounted in covered concrete emplacements which had withstood a continuous artillery bombardment lasting three weeks. The weather had been very good for many weeks, but now broke raining from the 26th to 31st. The ground became a quagmire. The tanks of the 20th Company were in Corps Reserve, and moved up from Fantasia Farm 3,000 yards west of the canal. The attacking tanks went forward in two waves accompanied by the infantry, and under cover of an artillery barrage. Of the eight tanks working with the 51st Division, five reached their objectives, completed the tasks allotted to them, and rallied ; one got ditched in deep mud soon after starting, and two had the misfortune to break down in action through mechanical troubles. Of the fifteen attached to the 39th Division, ten reached their objectives, four became ditched, while the remaining one was held up by mechanical breakdown. Despite the long spell of fine weather, the water-logged ground was very soft and badly broken by our artillery fire ; the early promise of the morning was not fulfilled, and at about eight o'clock heavy rain continued to fall which made much of the battle area virtually impassable. Many of the tanks had recourse to their unditching gear two or three times, and only four of those working with the 39th Division succeeded in rallying on the day of action.

The enemy's artillery supported his infantry in a resolute defence, and four tanks were completely disabled by direct hits. The attack accomplished the capture of the line of the Steenbeek and the village of St. Julien.

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Of the exploits of particular crews, the report concerning G43 may be taken as an example. This tank was one of those operating with the 51st Division, and became ditched just beyond the enemy's front line.

Extrication was effected by means of the unditching boom, but driving became very difficult and direction hard to maintain. The infantry were held up by machine-gun fire, and the tank succeeded in silencing two guns, and compelling the crews of two others to surrender. The tank then lost touch with the infantry following it, and the Tank Commander walked back with one of his crew to inform himself of the situation. He found the infantry too weak to attempt the crossing of the Steenbeek, and consolidation of the bridgehead, and deciding to dig themselves in under the heavy fire from field guns and machine guns to which they were being subjected. The Tank Commander returned to his tank, and waited for two hours in expectation of reinforcements to enable the infantry to attempt a crossing of the stream ; but none arriving, he decided, after consultation with the Infantry Commander, to return to his rallying point. On his way back the infantry stopped him with signals for assistance against a counter-attack, and he remained with them, putting out two enemy guns which had been rushed into shell-hole positions, and assisting the infantry to bring the enemy to a standstill.

The Infantry Commanders expressed high appreciation of the effective help rendered by the tanks throughout the day. Casualties to tank personnel numbered one officer and eleven others killed, and eight officers and sixteen others wounded.

A FAILURE.

The heavy rain that began on July 31st continued intermittently for a fortnight. A new attack was projected for August 16th, and the 20th Company was

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ordered to move up to assist the 11th and 48th Divisions on the Langemarck—St. Julien front. The approach from Fantasia Farm was commenced on the night of the 13th, the tanks wallowing on their bellies in ground too soft for the tracks to hold. The congestion of traffic precluded their being allowed to use the roads, and the country they had to traverse was all very deep in mud, large areas being, indeed, nothing but swamp. The approach was continued during the following night, but, in spite of the repeated use of unditching gears, the mutual help of tanks in towing each other, and the valued assistance of a Tunnelling Company of the Royal Engineers, it was recognized on the 15th that none but the four leading tanks could possibly hope to reach the line in time to take part in the battle. These four made strenuous efforts to complete the journey the next night, but without success. None of them could overcome the difficulties of the ground, and the infantry had to go into the attack without them.

AUGUST 19TH, 1917.

Better success attended a composite Company of the Battalion under the command of Major Broome, whose tanks took the chief part, in co-operation with two infantry Companies of the 11th and 48th Divisions, in an action fought on August 19th. On this occasion the tanks went along roads both on the approach march and throughout the action. The object of the attack was the destruction of four low-built concrete strong points—the Cockcroft, the Maison du Hibou, the Triangle, and Hillock Farm—established by the enemy to the north of St. Julien ; and two tanks were allotted to each objective, with three others in reserve. The starting point was the east side of the Steenbeek, and the attack commenced under cover of an artillery smoke barrage at 4.45 a.m. One tank, which had to leave the road to cross the river, became ditched and was unable to get

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forward, while another had radiator trouble and fell out of the column near the same place. All the strong points, except Triangle Farm, were cleared of the enemy by the tanks, the fire from which inflicted heavy casualties, and were occupied by our infantry. Triangle Farm was engaged only by one female tank, which slipped from the road and became ditched, and had all its Lewis guns put out of action by the enemy's fire. The crew of this tank got away under cover of darkness at nightfall; the Tank Commander fell into the enemy's hands, but succeeded in effecting his escape. Casualties to the Battalion were two killed and sixteen wounded. The infantry's casualties amounted to no more than fifteen men wounded.

The battle report respecting G29 may be taken as exemplifying the kind of work done by the tanks in this engagement. This male tank started from St. Julien at 4.45, and went along the Poelcapelle Road to a point from which the Maison du Hibou could be engaged in the rear. Forty rounds were fired from the 6-pounder guns into the back entrances to the stronghold. About sixty of the enemy's men crawled out and ran to take cover in shell-holes, but thirty of them were captured by our infantry, who took possession of the fort. The tank slipped from the road, the surface of which was so covered with mud as to be scarcely distinguishable, and became ditched. The crew continued to use their guns against the enemy's defences until the tank settled so deeply in the mud that elevation of the guns became impossible. The crew then evacuated the tank and helped the infantry to consolidate their new position.

PER ARDUA.

Much movement of tanks backward and forward took place subsequently to this action in preparation for other projected attacks, but the Battalion took no

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further part in fighting in the Ypres sector. Its work in the salient involved, indeed, an immense amount of labour and movement, in comparison with which it must be admitted that the results achieved were disproportionately small; but throughout this period in its history the Tank Service was on its trial, and the experimental value of "G" Battalion's often disheartening labours was very considerable. Much of its experience went to the negative demonstration of the tank's limitations, but the practical value of the new arm in making possible the capture of positions which could defy the most spirited attacks on the part of infantry supported by artillery only was conclusively established, and its possibilities in country better suited to its movements were perceived to be much beyond what had actually been accomplished.

FORMATION OF THE TANK CORPS.

During the Battalion's stay in the salient the tank formations were given a new name, a new corps styled the Tank Corps being constituted by Royal Warrant dated July 27th, 1917, and directions being given for the transfer to it of the personnel of the Heavy Branch.

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CHAPTER III

THE FIRST BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

IN the midst of laborious and frustrated struggles in the salient, mud-baffled tank crews were often moved to the expression of fervent longing for a country in which the tanks might have an opportunity of showing their paces and doing themselves justice. Their chance was at hand when the Battalion was moved on October 30th from Oosthoek to Wailly, ostensibly for some further general training in organized co-operation with infantry units.

Major Kenchington had relinquished the command of the 20th Company on account of sickness before the Battalion left Oosthoek, and on November 10th his place was taken by Major A. N. O'Kelly.

An attack was projected upon a quiet part of the front with a view to making a breach in the Hindenburg Line and achieving the capture of Cambrai. The maintenance of the strictest secrecy was essential to the intended surprise of the enemy, and reconnaissance of the ground to the north and east of Havrincourt Wood was carried out while the troops were engaged in practising concerted movements of tanks and infantry at Wailly. To facilitate their crossing of the Hindenburg trenches, which were known to be abnormally deep and of great width, the tanks were furnished with cylindrical fascines, made of railway sleepers and brushwood, some 8 feet long by 5 feet in diameter. The fascine was mounted above the nose of the tank, and was detachable from inside, so that it could be dropped in front of the tank as its nose dipped to cross a trench deeper and wider than had before been encountered.

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NOVEMBER 20TH, 1917.

The tanks were taken by rail to Bertincourt, and were camouflaged in the south-westerly part of Havrincourt Wood, and on the night of November 19th they moved up to their positions of deployment. The ground was perfect for tanks—undulating and well-drained grass land unbroken by shell fire, with a subsoil of chalk. The attack extended along a front of eight miles, and "G" Battalion, with sixteen tanks from "D" and "E" Battalions, was divided under Colonel Hankey into two composite Companies of thirty tanks, and allotted to the 62nd Division's sector, which formed the left of the 4th Corps front and extended from the Canal du Nord on the left to the east of Havrincourt Village. One of the composite Companies, comprising the 19th Company and the tanks from "D" and "E," was under the command of Major Fernie, and worked with the 187th Infantry Brigade on the left; and the other, consisting of the 20th and 21st Companies under Major Broome, worked in conjunction with the 185th Brigade on the right. The tanks deployed along taped routes in the small hours of November 20th, so as to reach their starting points on the outpost line in time for the attack which was timed to commence at 6.20 a.m. An artillery barrage opened the attack, and the fifty tanks that had reached their starting points advanced with the infantry. The enemy was completely surprised. His counter-barrage disabled two of the tanks as they started, but his infantry, except at a few points, offered little resistance, the tanks crushing down his wire and overrunning his machine guns, and our infantry sweeping forward behind them beyond Havrincourt and over the double line of the Hindenburg defences as far as the village of Graincourt, penetrating to a depth of 7,000 yards, and establishing a new line at the extremity of their advance, which at the time was the greatest advance ever made by British troops in a single day

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since the commencement of the war. Six tanks were put out of action by direct hits from two of the enemy's light field guns mounted in front of Graincourt, and these guns were in turn knocked out by 6-pounder fire from two tanks of the 20th and 21st Companies. A good example of individual prowess in this action is afforded by the battle history of the male tank G3 (Lieut. McElroy's tank and crew). Zero arrived just as this tank was crossing the wire on our outpost line. Its Commander dealt first with two defended craters, knocked out one machine gun, and drove away the personnel of another. He then made his way into Havrincourt Village, and passed up the main street under heavy fire from enemy machine guns, three of which were silenced by Lewis gun fire, and three more destroyed by means of the 6-pounders. A large shell crater full of water stopped his progress, and while backing his tank down the street to look for another way he discovered that his reserve of petrol on the roof had taken fire and was trickling down, still alight, to the inside of the tank. The crew used their extinguishers, but the fumes compelled them to get outside and take cover in a shell-hole. The enemy attempted to rush the tank, but the Tank Commander got inside, and, firing through the sponson doorway, killed four of them and wounded some others. The Germans took to their trench again, and the Tank Commander chose mountings for his Lewis guns and waited. In a few moments a fresh party of the enemy made a rush, and some of them got close up to the tank, one of them even attempting to get inside. This man and eight others the Tank Commander shot with his revolver. Another party then attacked the crew with hand grenades, and the Tank Commander opened fire with a Lewis gun, killing one and wounding four. After this the enemy slackened. Fire was opened at every sign of his moving, and the crew were called back to the tank. Two of the crew were missing, and the rest were going back for them when a party of our

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infantry reached the village. The crew shouted warnings to them, but just then about a hundred Germans came out of their trench with their hands up, and a few minutes later others came out of dug-outs in large numbers and surrendered.

At the close of a strenuous day the tanks were withdrawn to the Hindenburg support line.

NOVEMBER 21ST, 1917.

On the morning of the 21st the offensive was continued, twelve tanks taking the lead in an attack upon the village of Anneux and the ground to the north of it as far as the trench system in front of Bourlon Wood. All these tanks reached their objectives and took them, but the infantry were short of reinforcements, and were not numerically strong enough to hold on.

NOVEMBER 23RD, 1917.

On the 23rd a second attack was made on Bourlon Wood, in which ten of the tanks took part. The tanks made a late start owing to their having to wait for supplies delayed through the congestion of traffic on the roads to Havrincourt, but they passed the infantry inside the wood, and succeeded in enabling them to get farther forward and establish themselves before nightfall on its northern extremity.

No fault could be found with the ground over which the fighting during these three days took place, and full satisfaction was expressed with the part played by the tanks. The infantry bore themselves with great gallantry, but the numerical inadequacy of their reinforcements, which was very conspicuous in the later stages of the attack, left the tanks often unsupported, and suggested that the ideal combination of arms was still to seek.

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Cavalry patrols got as far as Cambrai, but the town was not taken. It remained in some sort the Mecca of "G" Battalion, and many of those who came in sight of it on this occasion lived to take a share in its capture after many days.

THE COUNTER-ATTACK.

The advance was arrested, and the Battalion withdrew to Havrincourt Wood. The wedge which the battle had driven into the enemy's line was too narrow, and a counter-attack in great strength, which the enemy made in a westerly direction from Gonnelieu on November 29th, led to the British retirement to the Hindenburg support line and to the summoning of "G" Battalion to Dessart Wood to strengthen the defence of the right flank of the new salient. Very severe weather followed with frost and snow, and for a fortnight the tanks occupied the wood, and did useful service in salving and towing back by night guns which had been abandoned in and about Villiers Pluich under pressure of the counter-attack. On December 14th the Battalion was relieved; the tanks were entrained at Fins and taken to Plateau, whence they were driven to Becordel, the Battalion going into winter quarters at Meaulte, near Albert.

Casualties to officers in the Cambrai fighting numbered one killed and thirteen wounded; of other ranks ten were killed and sixty-eight wounded.

CHANGE IN COMMAND.

Colonel Hankey left the Battalion after the Cambrai battle, being appointed to the command of a Tank Brigade. His successor was Major Fernie, who took command of the Battalion with the acting rank of Lieutenant-Colonel on January 16th, 1918, leaving the 19th Company in the hands of Major (then Captain) Winters, his late Second-in-Command.

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CHAPTER IV

MEAULTE

INTERLUDE.

IT has been observed that in retrospect a man is apt to find his past presenting itself in a kind of inverted perspective, so that what he had been used to think the main business of life is found to have dwindled into insignificance, while some trifling holiday, or even wholly incommemorable incident, has assumed a largeness that marks it as one of the landmarks of his journey. The history of "G" Battalion has a part in the lives of many men, and none of those who look back upon it could be willing to dismiss unnoticed the period spent at Meaulte—a period that looms large in the memory, though it is hard to find much that can be said of what happened there.

The period was one of reorganization (though remembered chiefly as one of recuperation and rest), and lasted about eight weeks.

The officers were quartered in huts on the hillside looking across the village of Meaulte towards Albert, and the men were billeted at first in the village itself, and later in large huts erected a short space below the officers' lines. Relief after the strain of war was found in the work of building and repairs, in arrangements for the seasonable celebration of Christmas and the New Year, in games of football, and in the social mingling of messes on many a memorable guest-night. Long-expected allotments of leave came round, gratifying some and inspiring a lively hope in others.

A School of Tank Instruction was formed by the Brigade at Becordel, for refresher courses in mechanism

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and driving, under Major Broome, whose command of the 21st Company passed into the hands of Major (then Captain) O. V. Guy, M.C.

REORGANIZATION.

At the New Year the 1st Brigade was reorganized, " D " and " E " Battalions leaving it and being succeeded by " K " and " L." At the same time, the Corps, in its tale of Battalions bidding fair to outrun the alphabet, the designation from letters was changed to numbers, " G " becoming the 7th ; but in all that went to foster *esprit de corps* the spirit was wedded to the letter, and unofficially and in the affections of its constituent members the Battalion is still " G," and as such still spoken and thought of and acclaimed at sports. There is a sort of character in the letters that has never attached itself to the numbers, and a mental translation to the old designation seems still necessary for the identification of a Battalion referred to in the new style. The ordinal numbering of Companies throughout the Corps was discontinued, and the 19th, 20th, and 21st became " A," " B," and " C " Companies of the 7th Battalion.

Major O'Kelly was appointed to the new post of Second-in-Command of the Battalion, and shortly afterwards left to take command of the 5th Battalion. He was succeeded in his command of " B " Company by Major (then Captain) C. G. Rossi-Ashton, who had been Adjutant of " G " Battalion since its formation, and in the post of Second-in-Command of the Battalion by Major F. Norton.

The stay at Meaulte was not remarkable for the occurrence of any event of importance, but it coincided very happily both in season and in spirit with the festive time of the years of peace, and was productive of a salutary drawing together of the units of the Battalion into

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a closer feeling of comradeship. It was beginning to be felt that the Tank Corps, for all its newness, was acquiring traditions, and a sense of having in some degree shared in the making of them began to diffuse through the Battalion a better realization of its corporate entity, a common pride in what had been achieved, and a common faith in the possibility of greater achievements to come.

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CHAPTER V

THE DEFENSIVE

ON February 15th the Battalion began to move from Meaulte to Bouvigny. Tanks were entrained at Plateau, " B " Company going to Hersin, and " A " and " C " Companies to Mont St. Eloi. By the 20th the move was completed, all the tanks being parked on the Lorette Ridge in the woods above Bouvigny Village. The Companies were billeted in the village, and Battalion Headquarters were at Boyeffles.

Reconnaissance was made of the Lens sector of the front, and dispositions were arranged for taking part either in a new attack or in counter-attacks to follow a possible attack by the enemy. From their position on the ridge the tanks were removed to Noulette Wood, between which and the Lorette Spur much rehearsal was practised with infantry Battalions of the Canadian Corps.

THE TANKS IN DEFENCE.

In March the enemy set himself to a final and desperate effort to win the war, launching on the 21st a series of swift and heavy blows directed at separating the Allies and encompassing the destruction of the British Armies.

The 7th Tank Battalion was at first allotted the task of defending the Bethune—Arras Road, the strategical design being that tanks should lie in camouflaged positions, and in event of a retirement harass the flanks and rear of such of the enemy's troops as might succeed in breaking through. No frontal attack on this formidable sector was attempted, but on both flanks the enemy pressure compelled retirement, and brought

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about such an attenuation of the line that gaps appeared in several places. To strengthen the line near Roclincourt during the night of March 28th and the following day, a detachment of the Battalion was sent up as an infantry Lewis gun unit ; and to fill up a breach during April 10th and 11th a similar detachment was sent into the line in front of Merville. The enemy broke through at Merville, and on the 12th a third detachment was sent to strengthen the new line running between Colonne and Robecq, upon which the enemy was held. Casualties in these actions numbered two officers killed, two wounded, and one captured ; and of other ranks nine killed, eighteen wounded, and ten missing.

About April 15th the three Companies were separated, " A " Company being sent with its tanks to Fouquieres, near Bethune ; " B " Company to Lillers ; and " C " Company to Aire, in readiness to take part in the defence of the line against an expected attack by the enemy on a wide front. Reconnaissance of the fronts was carried out and minor battles took place, but the tanks were not called upon.

After three weeks all the tanks were concentrated in a new disposition along a narrow front to the south-east of Bethune. They were camouflaged along a line about Annequin and Noyelles, with the intention of carrying out the same stratagem as was projected for the defence of the Bethune—Arras Road—the breaking up of an enemy attack that might succeed in reaching or getting beyond them.

No such success was attained by the enemy, but on May 17th his searching artillery discovered two of " B " Company's tanks and set them on fire. The remaining tanks of " B " Company were successfully withdrawn under bombardment and moved to new positions.

On April 30th Major Kenchington returned to the Battalion as Second-in-Command, taking the place of

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Major Norton, who had been wounded in the course of the Lewis gun operations.

At the end of May " A " Company was withdrawn to Enguinegatte, and " B " and " C " returned to Noulette Wood. Further practice exercises were carried out with the infantry of the Canadian Corps, and towards the end of July the Battalion returned its tanks to Erin and was sent to Merlimont for gunnery practice and a rest. Here the Battalion remained for a fortnight, in the course of which Battalion sports were held on the seashore, and at the end of it the Battalion went to draw new tanks at Erin. " B " Company took its new tanks to Hersin, and " C " Company went to Mont St. Eloi.

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Chapter VI

THE FINAL BATTLES

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

On July 18th General Foch opened on the Marne the counter-attack that heralded the triumph of the Allies, and the British attacks commenced on August 8th. On the night of the 15th "A" Company arrived at Saulty, from Erin, and on the night following "B" and "C" Companies arrived there from Hersin and Mont St. Eloi. The Battalion, which was attached to the 4th Corps, assembled at Bienvillers-au-Bois, being directed to assist the 37th Division in the capture of Ablainzeville and the high ground to the east of Bucquoy, and the 63rd and 5th Divisions in the taking of a second objective a line some 2,000 yards farther on.

AUGUST 21ST, 1918.

Tanks were taken to their lying-up positions on the night of the 19th, and the attack began at 4.55 on the morning of the 21st. Fourteen tanks manned by "A" Company were on the left, and "B" Company with eight tanks was on the right, and all went forward with the infantry behind a creeping barrage, capturing the first objective without meeting any effective resistance. There was a thick ground mist which made it impossible to see more than 20 yards, and the greatest difficulty was experienced in keeping direction and keeping touch with the co-operating troops. At 6.25 the advance was continued, "C" Company with eight tanks, and three of "A" Company's going forward with the 63rd Division on the left; and "B" Company, which

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had had one tank disabled by a direct hit and been reinforced by five reserve tanks, going forward with the 5th Division on the right. The infantry were established on their second objective by 7.30. All the tanks then went to rallying-points, where later three of them were disabled by the enemy's artillery fire.

AUGUST 24TH, 1918.

On the night of the 23rd all Companies moved forward to the line of the railway to the south of Achiet-le-Petit, beyond which the infantry had in the meantime established themselves, and lay up under the railway embankment.

At 2 a.m. on the 24th a section of four tanks was called for to assist the 63rd Brigade in the capture of Bihucourt and Biefvillers. Of these four tanks, which were under the command of Captain E. C. N. Custance, of "A" Company, two failed to get into action owing to mechanical trouble; but the remaining two did valuable work in destroying machine guns and enabling the infantry to advance and consolidate on their objective.

At 4 a.m. eight tanks of "B" Company were ordered forward to a further attack in conjunction with the New Zealand Division, and two of "C" Company's were detailed to silence machine guns which had been firing throughout the night. These machine guns were not located, but on the approach of the tanks they ceased firing, so that the infantry were enabled to advance unmolested. "B" Company's tanks went forward at 5 a.m.—one section of four, under Captain Fitzherbert, to assist in the capture of Grevillers; and one of three (the fourth having failed to start), under Captain Gregory, with Loupart Wood as its objective. The morning was dull, but there was no ground mist, and very heavy artillery and machine-gun fire was encountered. On the outskirts of Grevillers one of Captain

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Fitzherbert's tanks received a direct hit, and another was hit several times. The other two, having reached their objectives, rallied back at the railway. Captain Gregory's tanks also reached their objectives, two rallying, and the third being abandoned after sustaining five direct hits. The infantry were established in the wood and in the whole of the village, except its easterly corner, by 8 a.m.

AUGUST 25TH, 1918.

On the 25th four tanks from " A " Company, under Captain McChlery, went to assist the 37th Division to clear Sapignies ; while " C " Company, with eight tanks, went with the New Zealand Division on their right to take the road leading into Bapaume. The tanks left Grevillers at 5.10 a.m. in heavy mist. All attained their objectives, but one of " A " Company's and three of " C's " were destroyed by the enemy's artillery fire, which was very heavy throughout the action. The attack resulted in the advance of the line across the road and the capture of the high ground to the east of it, with very slight casualties to the infantry by 8.30.

CHANGE OF COMMAND.

On August 30th Colonel Fernie and Major Winters left the Battalion to go to a new Battalion in England. Lieutenant-Colonel H. O. C. Thorp was appointed to the command of the 7th Battalion, and Major L. P. B. Merriam, M.C., to the command of " A " Company.

AUGUST 30TH, 1918.

On the morning of the 30th four of " A " Company's tanks, under Captain McElroy, D.S.O., and four of " B " Company's, under Captain Allerton, which had lain up on the easterly side of the Arras—Bapaume Road near

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Sapignies, went forward to assist the 95th Brigade (the infantry being then established about 500 yards east of Beugnatre) in the capture of the trench line west of Beugny and the village of Beugny. Captain McElroy's tanks were on the left, moving north of Beugnatre, and one of them, breaking down on the way to the starting-point, had to be left behind. The attack started at 5 a.m., two of " B " Company's tanks going along the south side of the railway, and the other two being detailed to go round the north side of Beugny. Very heavy fire from field guns and machine guns was encountered, and a proportion of the shells were gas shells, which necessitated the wearing of gas masks by the tank crews. Two of " A " Company's tanks were disabled by direct hits on the high ground north-east of Beugny, and the same fate befell the right pair of " B " Company's tanks, while of the left pair one broke down with mechanical trouble. The remaining two tanks lost their way, and failed to reach their objectives. The enemy put up a determined resistance, and the tanks did good service in helping to overcome it, with the result that the infantry were enabled to advance 4,000 yards and establish themselves on their first objective with very slight losses.

SEPTEMBER 1ST, 1918.

On September 1st two of " B " Company's tanks were sent to clear the enemy out of a group of huts and machine-gun posts to the west of Bancourt on the road leading to Haplincourt. One of them, a male tank, passed through the group of huts, the crew firing all their 6-pounder ammunition, causing great destruction and clearing the enemy out. The other tank, a female, was hampered with mechanical trouble, and was only able to fire from a distance.

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SEPTEMBER 2ND, 1918.

Beugny was captured by the 5th Division (15th Brigade), with the assistance of a section of " C " Company's tanks under Captain Allden, M.C., on the 2nd, one tank being destroyed in the course of the action by shell fire. The infantry did not succeed in holding the position, and in the evening two of " A " Company's tanks were sent forward to assist in another assault. but before their arrival it was found that the enemy had evacuated the village and was retreating.

On the same day two of " C " Company's tanks, operating with the 42nd Division (127th Brigade), assisted in the capture of Villers-au-Flos, and an advance to the high ground to the south-east of it.

A PAUSE.

Several days of retirement on the part of the enemy were spent in repairing and refitting the Battalion's tanks and assembling them beside the Arras Road to the north of Bapaume.

On September 20th Major Guy left the Battalion to go to the International Tank School at Recloses, and was succeeded in the command of " C " Company by Major C. Palmer.

SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1918.

On the night of the 20th the Battalion's tanks were moved a distance of 11,500 yards to the village of Morchies. Five days later they were moved forward a farther distance of 6,000 yards to Pronville, and on the night of the 26th they left Pronville, and went into action at 5.20 the following morning. " C " Company, with eight tanks, under Captain C. E. Kessell, was allotted to the 1st Canadian Division, operating in the area from Inchy to the high ground north-east of Bourlon Village ; " A " Company, with eight tanks, to the 4th

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Canadian Division to attack Bourlon Village and the high ground east of Bourlon Wood ; and " B " Company, with eight tanks, to the 3rd Canadian Division in reserve.

" A " Company worked in two waves. Of the first wave two tanks effected the crossing of the dry cutting of the Canal du Nord, crushed the enemy's wire along the line of the canal, and patrolled along the enemy's trenches, doing good work with their machine guns. They then led the infantry forward and secured the enemy's second line. When this position had been consolidated, one tank went through Bourlon Village without meeting much opposition, and silenced some enemy machine guns on the railway embankment beyond the village. The other tank was delayed for an hour by mechanical trouble, and reached Bourlon Village after the infantry had occupied it. The other two tanks of the first wave crossed the canal, and led the infantry through Quarry Wood to their second objective. Here one of them broke down with engine trouble. The other went on, making for Bourlon Village, but overrunning our artillery barrage, it had to return. When the barrage lifted, this tank went forward again at the request of the infantry, and dealt with hostile opposition in a trench running round the north of the village. Of the second wave one tank failed to reach the canal through mechanical trouble, while another struck a tank mine in crossing, and was completely disabled. The other two crossed, led the infantry to the enemy's second line, and went forward to Bourlon Village, crushing wire obstacles and using their fire effectively against the enemy's machine guns.

" C " Company also worked in two waves, crossing the canal and capturing the village of Sains-les-Marquions and Deligny Mill, and rendering effective help to the infantry by crushing wire and destroying machine-gun nests. Three tanks sustained direct hits and were

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put out of action. The remaining tanks of both Companies rallied after seeing the infantry established at the extremity of their advance.

SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1918.

" B " Company, with eight tanks, left the Canal du Nord at 1 o'clock on the morning of the 28th, and accompanied the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade in an attack from the north-east of Bourlon Wood at 6 a.m. The main objective was the Marcoing line, 2,500 yards away to the east, which all the tanks reached. Four of them went farther on to the Arras—Cambrai Road between Raillencourt and St. Olle. They encountered few of the enemy's infantry, but were attacked with machine-gun fire and bombs from enemy aeroplanes, which were successfully repulsed.

SEPTEMBER 30TH, 1918.

The 7th Canadian Brigade attacked again from the Cambrai—Douai Road on the 30th, assisted by three of " A " Company's tanks and three of " C's." On the left " A " Company had Sancourt and Bécourt as its objectives, and " C " Company was on the right making for Tilloy and the chapel and mill some 1,500 yards to the north of it. Two of " A " Company's tanks reached their objectives, but the third was surrounded by the enemy and cut off, the Tank Commander being killed and the surviving members of the crew being taken prisoners. One of " C " Company's tanks was disabled by a direct hit after crossing the Cambrai—Douai Railway. Another dealt with the chapel and mill, and then turned south and went into Tilloy, while the third cruised along the railway, knocking out machine guns, but afterwards, in making for Tilloy, broke one of its tracks and became immobile.

Casualties suffered by the Battalion in the course of the actions recounted in this chapter numbered :—in

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killed, four officers and thirteen of other ranks; in wounded, nineteen officers and 114 of other ranks; while ten men were reported missing.

THE DÉBÂCLE.

The enemy's retirement from Cambrai after these actions proceeded so rapidly that Mark IV tanks were unable to keep pace with it. The Battalion was pushed forward in two echelons, one going as far as Ramillies, and the other following behind it to Tilloy; but the tanks did not get into touch with the retreating armies. On October 12th the Battalion was withdrawn into G.H.Q. Reserve. The tanks assembled near Fontaine Notre Dame, and on the 27th were entrained at Havrincourt for Erin, where the next day they were returned to the Central Workshops, the Battalion going to Blingel Camp.

On October 18th Major C. E. Kessell succeeded Major Rossi-Ashton (who went to Camberley for a staff course) in the command of " B " Company.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

THE ARMISTICE.

AT Blingel the Battalion was supplied with eight Mark V Tanks, and proceeded with courses of instruction in their driving and maintenance.

During the Battalion's first fortnight here events moved on the Western Front with great rapidity. The enemy made no recovery, and initiated preliminaries of peace. He was referred to Marshal Foch for terms of armistice, and his plenipotentiaries attended at the French General Headquarters.

On the morning of November 11th a parade of the Battalion was summoned for 10.30, when the announcement was made that the enemy had accepted the Allies' terms and that hostilities would cease at 11 o'clock. The news was received with shouts of joy, and work was suspended for the rest of the day.

In the fighting which brought about the downfall of our enemies and the final triumph of the Allies—a consummation devoutly and long desired—the Tank Corps had the honour to play an important and effective part, and may claim to have abundantly justified the hopes in which it was formed and developed. Among the Tank Battalions, the one of which a brief record is here presented has not been the least conspicuous in achievement, notwithstanding that in the final series of attacks it appeared in rivalry with Battalions equipped with newer and swifter weapons than the Mark IV Tank with which the 7th Battalion worked throughout its fighting days.

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The record is nothing more ambitious than an epitome, and, taking little account of the contemporary activities of other units, it is devoid of perspective.

Some mention cannot be omitted of the work of the technical and supply services, whether within the Battalion or under separate administration. Efficiency in these services, without which fighting were impossible and valour useless, has been uniformly of a very high standard.

It has not been found possible to introduce into this account many names beyond those of Battalion and Company Commanders. To have done so would have been to discriminate, without much hope of discriminating justly, between the services of individual officers and men. Of those of the Battalion who have given their lives for the best of causes, and of those whose services have received official recognition, lists are appended.

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APPENDIX A

7th TANK BATTALION

ROLL OF HONOUR

KILLED IN ACTION OR DIED OF WOUNDS.

Lieut.	G. H. Adney, M.C.	Pte.	Comins, V.
,,	W. H. Brassington, M.M.	,,	Cook, W. C.
		,,	Coppack, J. C.
,,	L. Clegg.	,,	Cutler, H.
,,	G. D. McLean.	,,	*Donnelly, W. J.
,,	J. L. Muirhead.	,,	Duke, C.
2/Lieut.	W. E. Atkinson.	,,	Dunn, A. H.
,,	*C. S. Beaven.	,,	East, M.
,,	J. W. Lynch.	,,	Frazer, C.
Sergt.	Duddridge, H., D.C.M.	,,	Hamon, F. J.
		,,	Hilton, M.
,,	Maloney, T. B.	,,	*Holt, A.
,,	Morgan, J. C.	,,	Hunnaball, H.
,,	Wilson, H. J.	,,	Jarvis, R. E.
Corpl.	Barker, C. M.	,,	Kelsall, H.
,,	Corney, J. F.	,,	Learoyd, G.
,,	Hammond, H. C.	,,	Linton, F. H.
,,	Sharpe, F. G.	,,	Mason, R. G.
,,	Witcomb, A.	,,	Mungall, G.
L./Cpl.	Barlow, A. S.	,,	Nash, C. J.
Artificer	Lawley, T.	,,	Newell, C.
Pte.	Baines, J. R.	,,	Nicholls, J. W.
,,	Bousfield, E.	,,	O'Mahoney, V. L.
,,	Brewer, S.	,,	Pattinson, J.
,,	Brooks, P. T.	,,	Prescott, H.
,,	Brown, R. P.	,,	Quinn, J.
,,	Butterworth, W.	,,	Redfern, F.
,,	Caffrey, G. A.	,,	Russell, A. J.
,,	Chandler, A. T.	,,	Rutter, H. M.

* Not officially reported killed, but missing after the Lewis gun operations of April, 1918, and since unheard of.

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Pte.	Sammon, W.	Pte.	Williams, W. C.
,,	Thomas, D. M.	,,	Wilson, J.
,,	*Thornhill, G. H.	,,	Wise, A. J.
,,	Wilkinson, H.	,,	Wishart, W.

Died on Active Service.

Capt.	F. W. McElroy, D.S.O.	Pte.	Bottini, R.
		,,	Flack, A. W.
C.S.M.	Roach, T, D.	,,	Pentelow, S. V.
Sergt.	Machin, H.	,,	Pollard, W.
Corpl.	Beatham, R. S.	,,	Smith, J. R.
Pte.	Berrow, A.	,,	Wright, A. H.

* Not officially reported killed, but missing after the Lewis gun operations of April, 1918, and since unheard of.

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Appendix B

HONOURS AND AWARDS

Honours have been awarded to the undermentioned Officers, non-commissioned officers, and men in respect of services in the Battalion as follows :—

Distinguished Service Order.

Bde.-Gen. E. B. Hankey.
Lt.-Col. F. H. Fernie.
Major R. H. Broome.
,, O. V. Guy.
Major C. G. Rossi-Ashton.
Capt. F. W. McElroy.

Military Cross and Bar.

Capt. A. G. Baker.
Capt. C. H. Kinnison.

Bar to Military Cross.

Major O. V. Guy.

Military Cross.

Major H. H. Hatton-Hall.
Capt. J. Allden.
,, J. Brown.
,, D. G. Browne.
,, C. R. Burton.
,, F. D. Chadwick.
,, H. G. Coutts.
,, E. T. Morgan.
,, G. S. Ritchie.
Capt. B. G. d'U. Rudd.
,, S. A. Smith.
,, R. W. Stafford.
,, R. A. Wadeson.
,, E. V. Wright.
Lieut. G. H. Adney.
,, F. L. Waine.
2/Lieut. W. B. Duncan.
,, W. T. Parkes.

Mentioned in Despatches.

Major O. V. Guy.
,, C. G. Rossi-Ashton.
,, J. W. Winters.
Capt. J. Allden.
,, H. C. Allerton.
Capt. G. C. McChlery.
,, R. H. Moore.
,, P. Paisley.
,, A. L. Paramor.

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SILVER MEDAL (ITALY).

Capt. B. L. Q. Henriques.

DISTINGUISHED CONDUCT MEDAL.

C.S.M.	Dick, T.	Sergt.	Harris, T. H.
Sergt.	Duddridge, H.	,,	White, H. A.

MILITARY MEDAL AND BAR.

Corpl. Owen, F.

MILITARY MEDAL.

C.Q.M.S.	Taylor, G. M.	Corpl.	Sykes, E.
M.S.S.	Greenwood, F. H.	L./Cpl.	Doe, W. V.
Sergt.	Bannister, G. W.	,,	Dowsett, J.
,,	Mayrick, J. C.	Pte.	Benzie, W.
,,	Penny, A. C.	,,	Cooke, C. R.
,,	Ross, A.	,,	Coultas, B. G.
,,	Ross, H. E.	,,	Higgins, J.
,,	Stockdale, E.	,,	Hunt, S. C.
Corpl.	Beardmore, T. G.	,,	Pottinger, M. W.
,,	Crawshaw, S.	,,	Sargent, J. J.
,,	Parkinson, A. E.	,,	Savage, F.
,,	Philip, D. T.	,,	Smith, H. E.
,,	Rayner, T.	,,	Thomson, G.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE MEDAL.

C.Q.M.S.	Roberts, O. W.	Sergt.	Waller, R. W.

MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES.

C.S.M.	Coombs, T.	Corpl.	Cook, E. A. T.
Sergt.	Blackham, E.		

BRONZE MEDAL (ITALY).

Corpl. Cook, E. A. T.

CROIX DE GUERRE (BELGIUM).

R.S.M.	Ollerton, R.	Sergt.	Gregory, S.
Sergt.	Duddridge, H.	Corpl.	Don, H.

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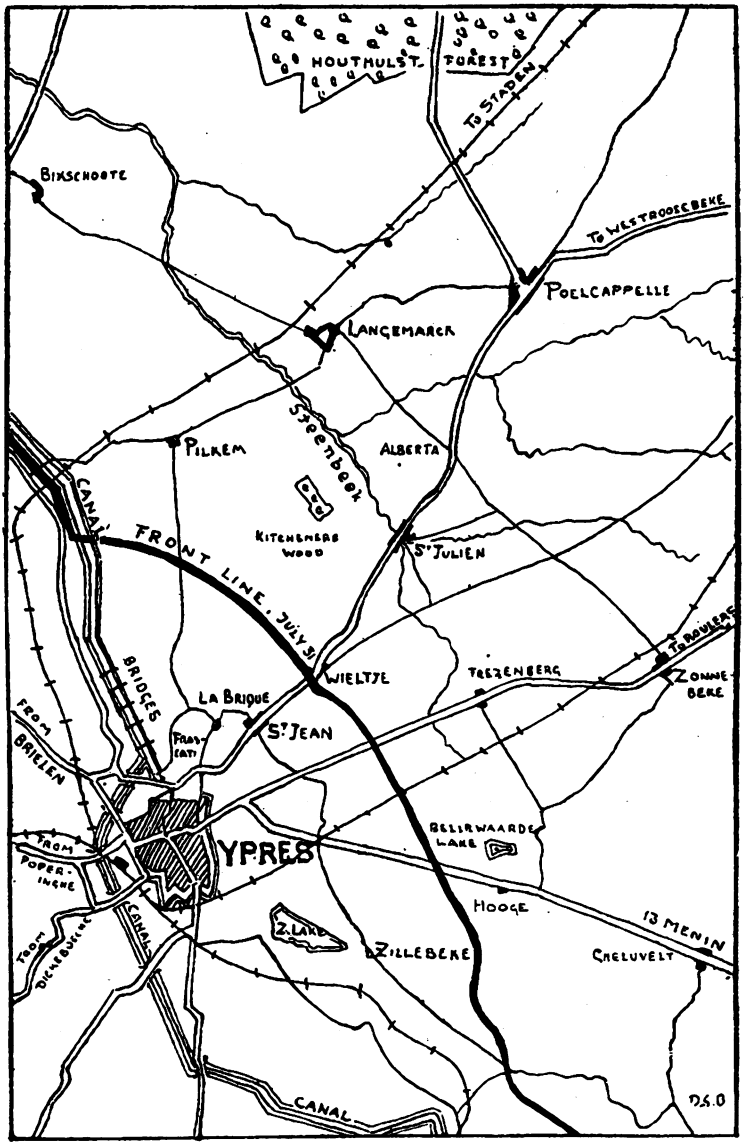
MAP I.



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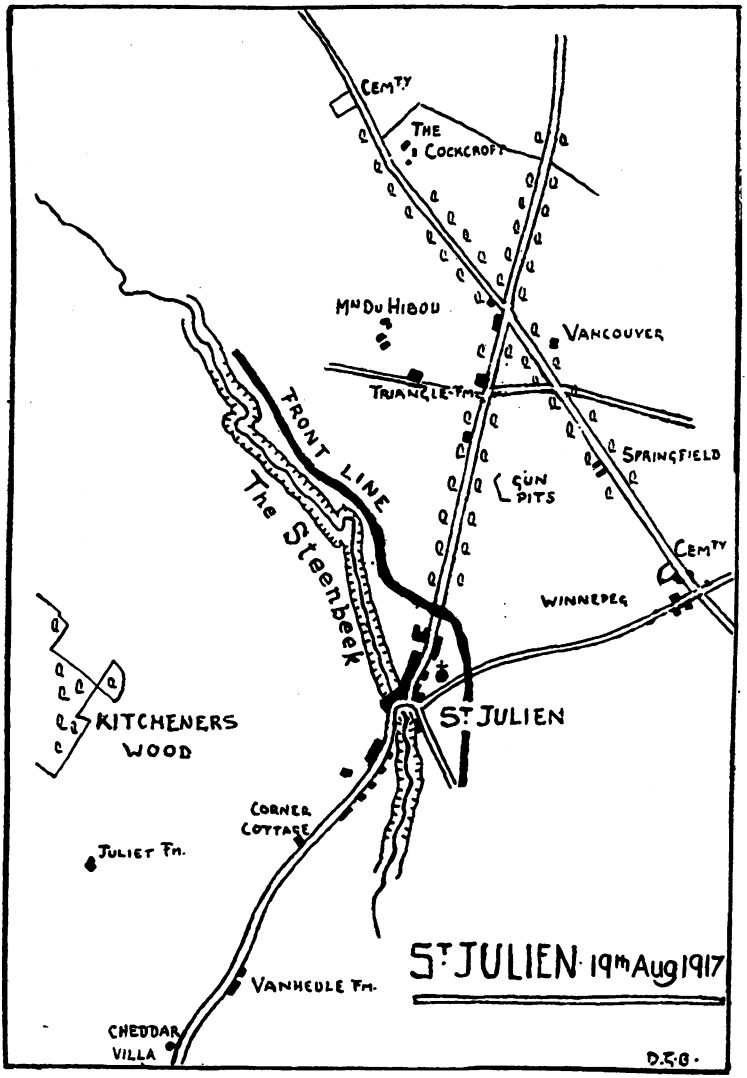

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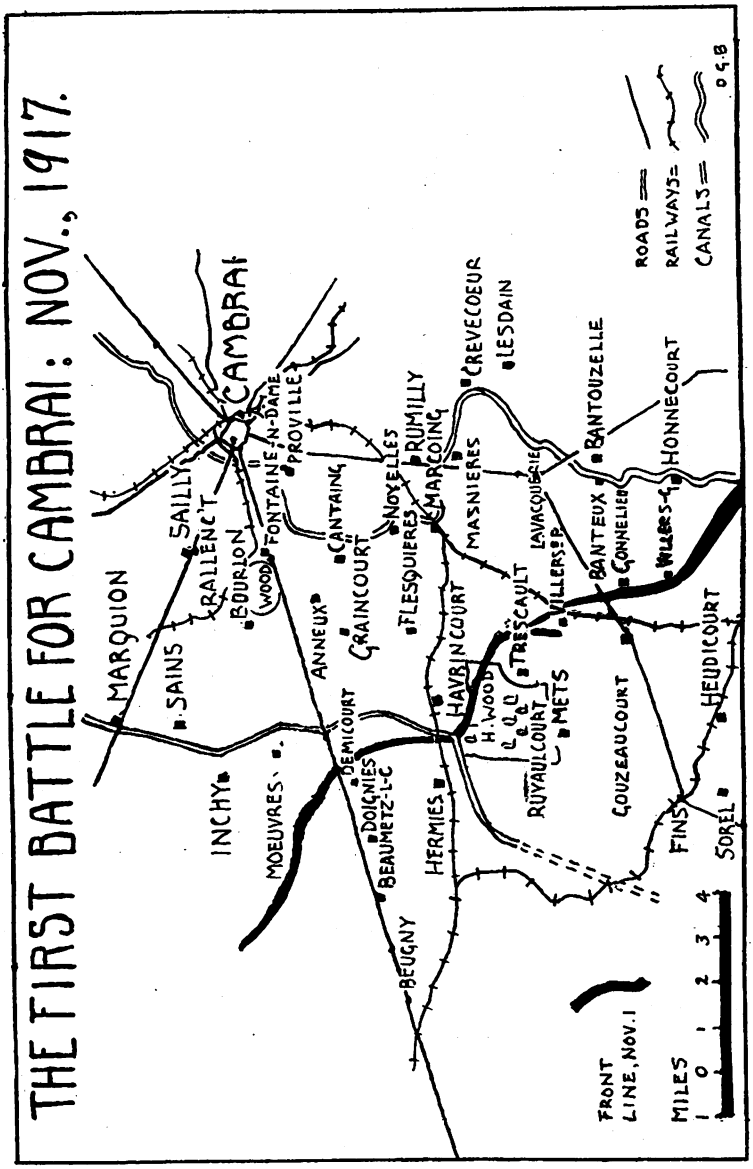

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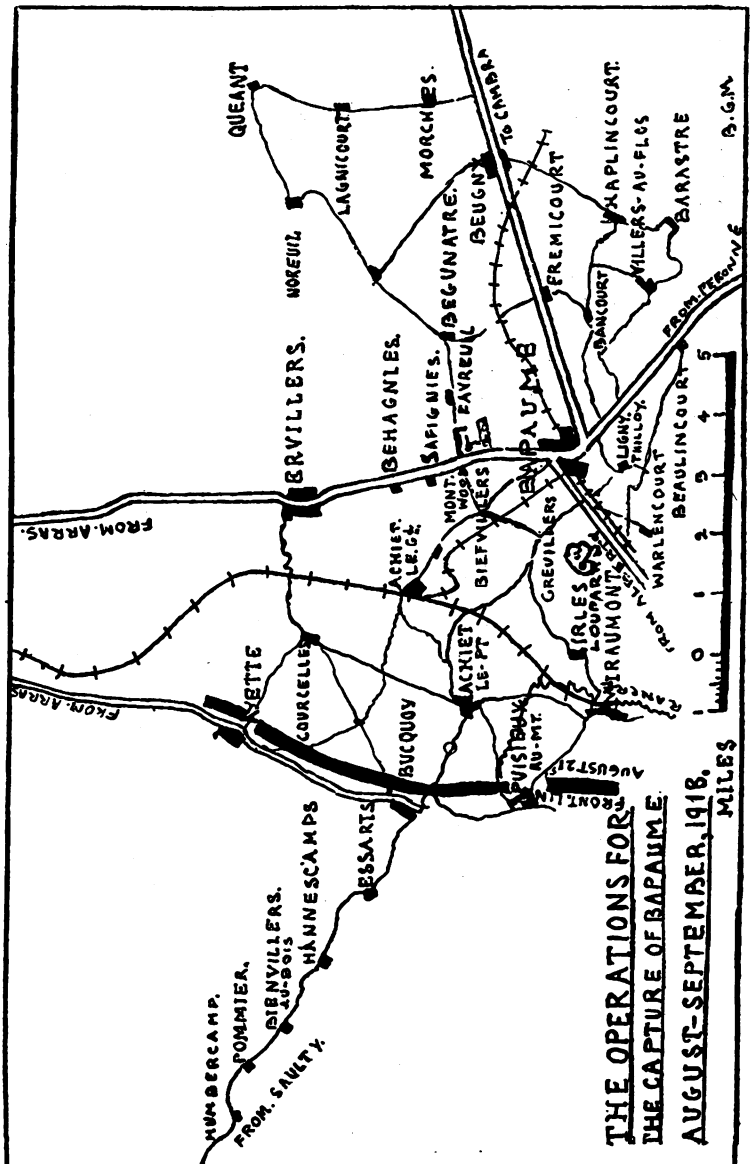

THE OPERATIONS FOR
THE CAPTURE OF BAPAUME
AUGUST-SEPTEMBER, 1918.

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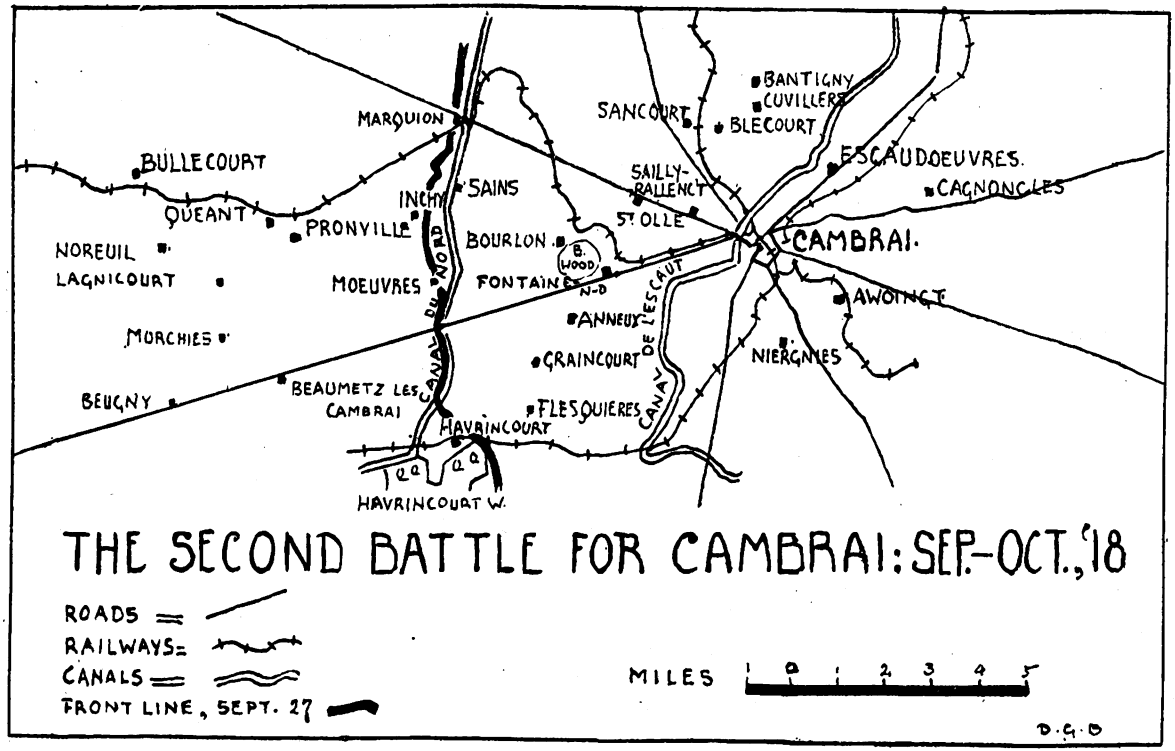

MAP V.

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